# Operation Iraqi Freedom

## Reunion Briefing

**Chaplain Cody Vest**

# Purpose

To prepare soldiers and families for the exciting and difficult process of reunion

# Reunion

A time of readjustment after separation; the process of making life “normal” again

# The Goal

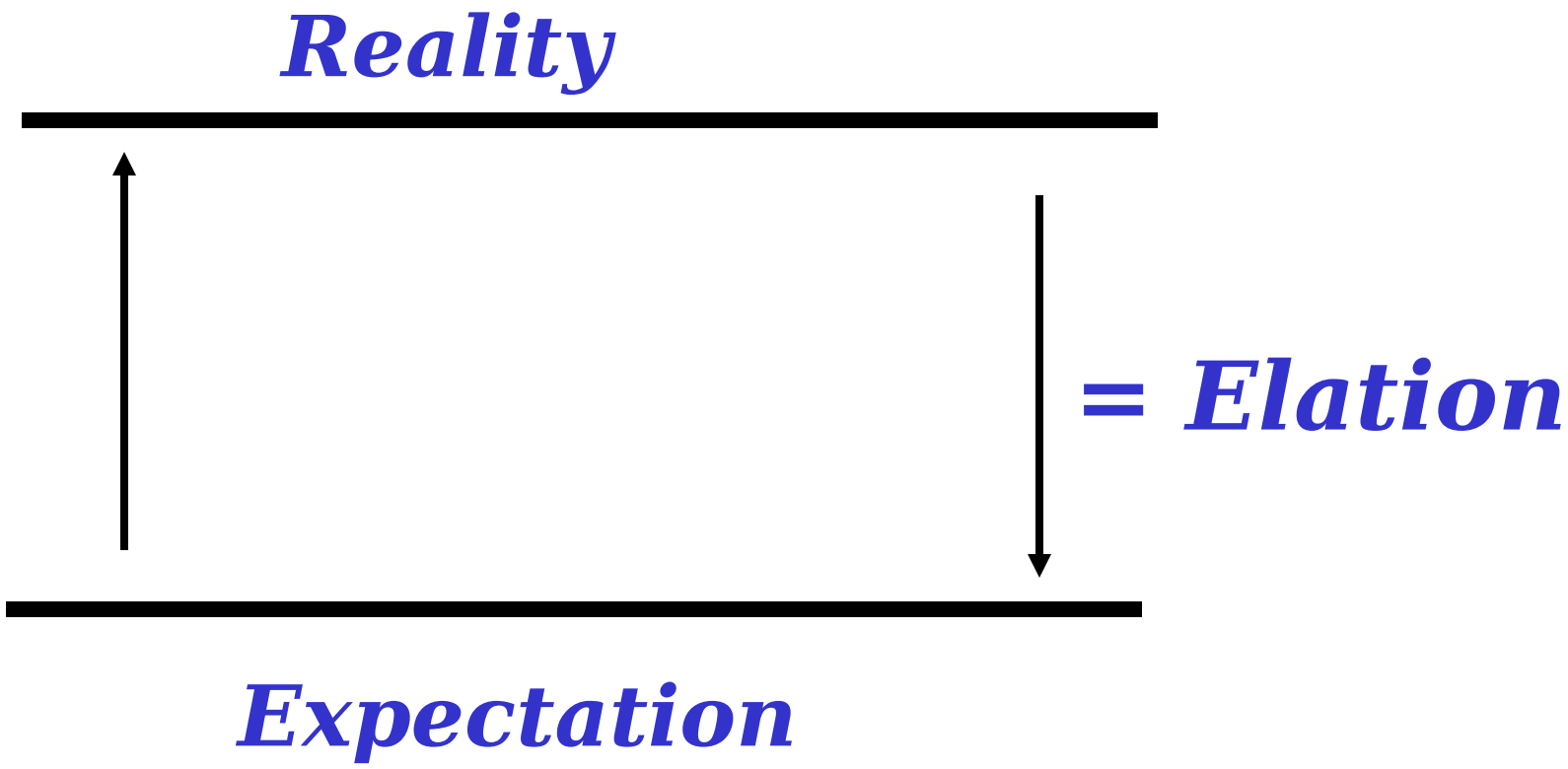
The goal is that every reunion would be a “gentle merger” and not a “head-on collision”

# Agenda

- Introduction
- Post-deployment Realities & Emotions
- Reunion with your Children
- Reunion with your Spouse
- Reunion Stress & Flashbacks
- How to Cope
- Conclusion

# Post-Deployment Realities

- Reunion can be as challenging as deployment
- Ordinary person who has experienced extraordinary events
- Everyone has changed
- Communication may be difficult at first
- Roles have changed
- Interests may have changed
- Old problems haven’t disappeared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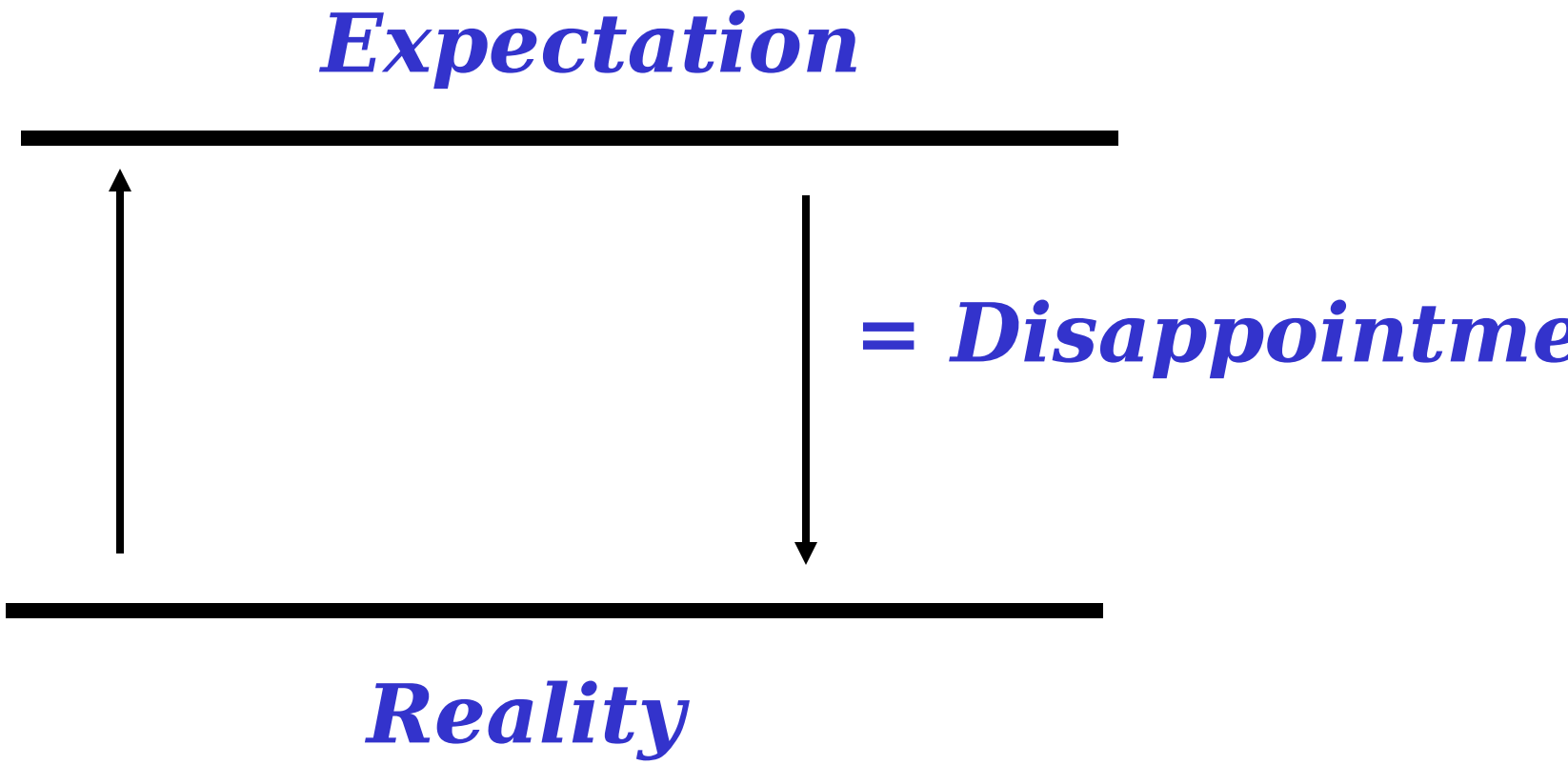
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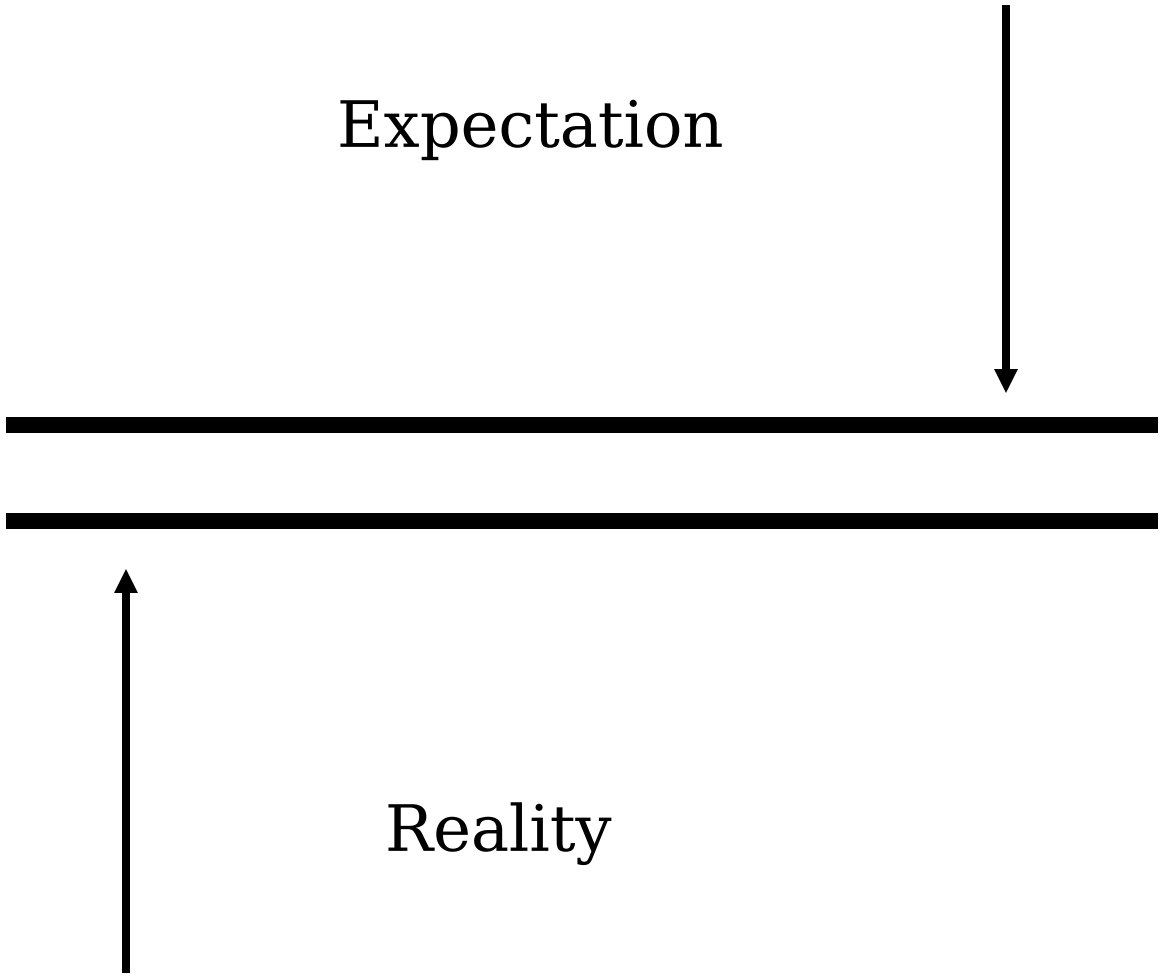

Expectation
Reality

# Post-Deployment Emotions

**Children's Emotions (Age):**

- May not know you when held (<1)
- Hide or slow to approach (1-3)
- Guilt or scared about your absence (3-5)
- Demand time and attention (6-12)
- Moody or act disinterested (>13)
- Divided loyalties and fear (All ages)?

# Suggestions for a Successful Reunion with your Children

- Communicate (talk & listen) about your separation experiences
- Make it a family reunion – don’t leave the children out
- Spend special one-on-one time with each child
- Don’t force the reunion
- Comfort, hug, and reassure constantly
- Love is spelled T-I-M-E!

# Post-Deployment Emotions

**Soldier's Emotions:**

- Will my family still need me?
- Will my kids recognize me?
- How did things go while I was gone?
- Will everyone be happy to see me?

# Post-Deployment Emotions

**Spouse's Emotions:**

- How much has my spouse changed?
- Have I made good financial decisions?
- Did I do okay with the kids?
- Does he feel the same about me?

# Handle Change With Tolerance and Flexibility

# Steer Clear of Immediately Making Urgent Pressurized Decisions if Possible

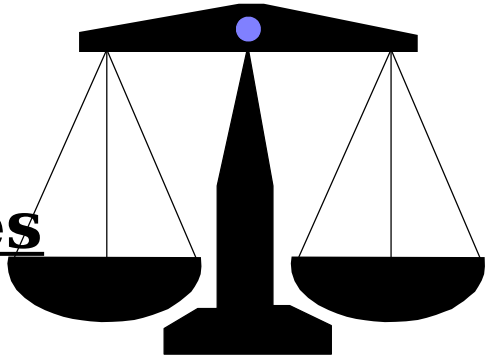
# Be Sensitive To Changes In Your Loved Ones

Men
ON
OFF
Women
ON
OFF

# Reestablishing Intimacy

## *Balancing Intimacy and Sex*

- **Differences in Male and Female Sexuality**
  - **male focus sexual act**
  - **female focus “relational”**
- **Make Intimacy Your Goal**
- **Temporary  Performance Difficulties**
- **May Be Emotionally or Physically Awkward**
- **Honeymoon Will Wear Off**
- **High Expectation Can Lead to Tremendous Disappointments**



# Expect Some Depression After Honey-moon phase

# Homecoming Letdown

- **Unrealistic Expectation**
- **Pre-Deployment Problems Remain**
- **Depression**
  - **Two weeks or longer is serious**
  - **Aware of suicidal risk**
  - **Seek counseling, see chaplain**
- **Drug or Alcohol Abuse**
- **Domestic Violence**
- **Anxiety or Panic; Nightmares**

# Flashbacks

- Flashbacks are episodes of re-experiencing the events that occurred during a deployment
- During a flashback episode, soldiers feel as if they are “back in the Gulf” and are may not be aware of their immediate surroundings
- Although disconcerting and uncomfortable, flashbacks are generally normal and not associated with a more serious problem *UNLESS* they persist for several months or cause significant interference in a soldier’s ability to function normally

# Flashbacks (2)

- Flashbacks may occur in response to a “trigger” (e.g., a loud noise that sounds like a weapons discharge) or spontaneously without a “trigger”
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by reminding themselves that flashbacks are to be expected
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by discussing them with family, friends, supervisors
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by seeking professional assistance if they are concerned about these experiences

# Possible Additional Reactions

- Difficulty talking about deployment experiences
- Difficulty readjusting to family routines
- Difficulty reconnecting with children and spouse
- Discomfort being around other people

# Positive (+) Coping Mechanisms

- Take time to Rest and Relax
- Spend time with family and friends (when ready)
- Get together with buddies to discuss deployment
- Resume a hobby that was not available during the deployment
- Working around the house
- Take leave
- Reconnect with friends and family who live elsewhere

# Negative (-) Coping Mechanisms

- Drinking alcohol excessively
- Taking illegal drugs
- Going on a spending spree
- Gambling
- Picking fights
- Driving recklessly
- Excessive risk taking behaviors
- Isolating oneself for long periods

# When Normal Reactions Become Problematic

- Functional impairment: anything that significantly interferes with a soldier's ability to do the things that he or she needs to do in any important area of life (work, home, family, social, spiritual)
- Constant oversleeping is a common reaction to deployment that can become a functional impairment
- Functional impairment is the clearest sign that a normal reaction to deployment may be turning into a more serious problem

# When Normal Reactions Become Problematic (Cont)

- If normal reactions persist longer than 6 – 8 weeks ***AND*** continue to cause the soldier distress, it may be a sign that normal reactions to deployment may be turning into a more serious problem
- However, there is **no set time line** for normal reactions to resolve; in some soldiers 6 – 8 weeks is sufficient, others may need more or less time

# Referral Sources for More Serious Issues

- Chain of command
- Chaplain
- Unit or hospital behavioral health officer
- Unit sick call
- Army OneSource

# *Tips for Returning Soldiers*

- **Make homecoming a special event….but**
  - **Don’t pack six month of fun into one weekend**
  - **Too many activities  increases stress level**
- **Express gratitude to significant others**
- **Don’t Play Monday Morning Quarterback**

# Tips For The Returning Soldier (con't)

- **Give family time to having you around again**
- **Go slowly on disciplinary issues**
- **Save knock-down drag-out issues for later**
- **No problems are too big to solve….**

  **-only people too small to solve them**

# *Tips for Spouse*

- **Allow the soldier to have his space**
  - **May not be used to all the activity at home**
  - **Not used to children**
- **Don’t press for decisions**
- **Be patient**
  - **Remember he has been used to functioning in a military environment not a family environment**
  - **Allow him to “find his place” in the family**

# Keep Channels of Communication Opened

# Remember Reunion Is A Process Not An Event

# QUESTIONS !!!